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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000443

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SUBJECT: (U) KDP AND PUK ALLIANCE NOT ALL SMILES

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Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S.
Ford for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: During a February 8 dinner party at Iraqi Minister of Planning (and senior PUK Politburo member) Barham Saleh's house, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Intelligence Chief Masrur Barzani revealed deep-seated suspicions of the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), confirming that the merger of the two Kurdistan Regional Governments (KRGs) in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah may be more cosmetic than actual. Barzani complained at length about the PUK. He reacted in a surprisingly defensive manner about reports of increased KDP presence in Khanaqin and on the investment initiatives for Sulaymaniyah in the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) report. His negative reaction to the PUK, however, appears to confirm other rumors that the alliance between the PUK and the KDP is difficult to manage. End Summary.

(U) Kurds Can Work With Anyone...

12. (C) During a February 8 dinner party at Iraqi Minister of Planning (and senior PUK Politburo member) Barham Saleh's house, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Intelligence Chief Masrur Barzani claimed that, while the delay by the Shia Coalition in naming their Prime Minister candidate is regrettable, the Kurds could work with any of the four choices. Upon questioning, Barzani admitted that the KDP had had its problems with current Prime Minister Ja'afari, but emphasized that the Kurds would not dream of dictating to the Shia whom they should choose for Prime Minister. He added, somewhat ominously, that he expected the same consideration from the other groups when it came to selecting candidates for the Kurdish-led ministries.

(U) ...As Long As It's Not Each Other

13. (C) Barzani displayed a surprising defensiveness, however, when queried about issues involving the PUK. When PolOff asked about rumors that the Kid's intelligence wing (Asayish) was moving into Khanaqin, Barzani immediately said, "Who told you that? Was it the PUK? Was it the Arabs? I bet it was the PUK, wasn't it?" Without waiting for a response, Barzani launched into a twenty minute tirade about how a KDP member had legitimately won

the Chief of Police position in Khanaqin. The PUK, he said, always claimed falsely that they were the ruling power in Khanaqin when the KDP historically had a higher presence there. In addition, Barzani said, the purported "KDP march to Khanaqin" consisted of just one man - the new Chief of Police.

¶4. (C) After a pause, Barzani brought up the Overseas Private Investment Corporation's (OPIC) initiatives to promote private investment in Iraq. He asked for a meeting with EconMinCouns to discuss why the OPIC projects favored Sulymaniyah. "I know why the initiatives focus so much on Sulymaniyah," Barzani said, "It's because Barham Saleh is close to Robert Mosbacher (OPIC President) and he influenced the decision in favor of the PUK behind the scenes." Erbil, he continued, was much more advanced and more suitable for private investment. (COMMENT: We are arranging a meeting with Barzani and the EconMinCouns. END COMMENT.)

(U) Dr. Nadir's Arrest Was a Mistake

¶5. (C) In response to PolOff's query on the status of Dr. Kamal Qadir, the Austrian citizen who was sentenced to 30 years for defamatory comments about the Barzani family (reftel), Barzani stated that the arrest should never have happened. Masrur said that if he had been in Erbil when it occurred he would have prevented it. He hinted that the authorities in Erbil had no choice but to prosecute once the other victims of Qadir filed a lawsuit. Qadir is a

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mental case who only wanted attention, claimed Barzani. "He admitted to me in person that he only did this to ensure that everyone knew his name," claimed Barzani, "and he admitted that everything he said was a lie." While it was unfortunate the western press picked up the story, Barzani insisted that the judiciary in Kurdistan had to deal with the issue in its own time; the Barzanis could not demand that the courts just release Qadir without going through the appropriate procedures.

(U) Comment

¶6. (C) Masrur Barzani is the son of KDP leader and Kurdistan Region President Masud Barzani; he is well-informed about senior KDP thinking. A smooth political operative, he presents a mild face to the world. It is possible that Barzani was posturing for effect during his conversation with PolOff; the intensity of his instinctive response on the PUK, however, suggests that his reaction was spontaneous. His attitude confirms previous report (reftel B) that the KDP retains suspicions about PUK leader Talabani. The KDP is rumored to be uncomfortable with the bargain struck with the PUK - KDP support for Talabani as President of Iraq in exchange for recognition of Barzani's preeminence in Kurdistan - and the KDP fears that it would give the PUK too much power in Baghdad. In fact, many KDP members have told PolOff that they feel the KDP has been shortchanged in power positions in Baghdad. The Kurds have been singularly powerful in Baghdad during the past two years by working as a bloc; the problem has historically been their inability to maintain unity even in the face of a common enemy. Our sense is that the PUK-KDP relationship remains a difficult one to manage.

